

# On The Right Path

An external evaluation of the PATH Project, a partnership supporting people experiencing, and at risk of, homelessness across North and West Kent.

Steve Allman, September 2020



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## About PATH

PATH (Preventing Actual & Threatened Homelessness) provides a range of services for people who are experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness across various parts of North and West Kent.

The project was developed by Citizens Advice North & West Kent, which led a successful bid to the National Lottery Community Fund and is the lead partner, delivering 72% of interventions and ensuring the project meets its contractual obligations, including monitoring and reporting.

In the year prior to the project commencing, Citizens Advice North & West Kent noted that housing enquiries to their helpline had increased by 20% and their records showed that actual homelessness increased by 25% and threatened homelessness by 6%.

CANWK recognised that a collaborative effort could provide an effective service for people facing hardship and crisis and convened a partnership of local organisations with complementary skills and expertise to support the project's delivery as follows:

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## PATH Partners

**Choices** - provides emergency hostel accommodation for young people aged 16-25.

**Citizens Advice North & West Kent (CANWK)** - provides advice and support concerning housing, maximising income, debt assistance to enable people to stay in their homes or sustain new accommodation and targeted outreach to support vulnerable people who may not visit a central location.

**Crosslight** - (previously West Kent Debt Advice) provides debt assistance to prevent homelessness and sustain accommodation.

**Porchlight** - provides support to people who are street homeless via a designated street worker who proactively identifies people in crisis and links them to partner organisations.

**Samaritans** - provides a free, confidential telephone listening service to people experiencing crisis or distress and volunteers occasionally work alongside PATH partners to promote the project locally.

**West Kent Mediation** - provides preventative mediation services to people who have been evicted, or are at risk of eviction, particularly young people who may be experiencing conflict with their parents.

**West Kent Mind** - provides mental health support to people experiencing hardship or crisis alongside, or as a result of, mental health.

Partners meet on a quarterly basis to review progress, impact and address any challenges facing the project. Partners submit quantitative data to CANWK on a regular basis, in addition to case studies about clients who have benefited from their support.

PATH supports people in need by assisting rough sleepers, providing hostel accommodation to young homeless people, mediation to those at risk of eviction, mental health support and advice, housing support and advice and support with debt and benefits.

PATH enables partner organisations to have a positive impact under four core project outcomes as follows:

## Overarching Funding Outcomes

- 1. Improving the circumstances of people who have experienced actual or threatened homelessness by securing accommodation and providing tailored advice and support.**
- 2. Enabling people at high risk of actual or threatened homelessness to plan for the future by providing tailored debt, benefits and housing advice, mediation and mental health support.**
- 3. Improving support to people facing hardship by sharing learning and evidence across organisations, producing findings through ongoing reporting and evaluation and using feedback to improve the understanding of the needs of service users.**
- 4. Strengthening the voice of those facing hardship to shape a better response to their needs by identifying and supporting peer champions and participating in local forums.**

## About the Evaluation

Citizens Advice North & West Kent (as lead partner) commissioned this external evaluation in early 2020 with a view to gaining an objective view of the project's impact in the lives of people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness or housing crisis.

CANWK appointed Steve Allman, an independent consultant with extensive experience of evaluating National Lottery Community Fund projects, who had supported the Year 3 evaluation by surveying PATH partners and appraising the self-evaluation report.

The COVID-19 pandemic began shortly after the report was commissioned and the evaluator was unable to meet with partners and clients in person, so the methodology was adapted to include telephone interviews and online video conferencing software such as Zoom.

10 service users took part in qualitative telephone interviews where they were able to explain the impact of the project in their lives. 7 had been helped by Citizens Advice North &

West Kent, 2 by Crosslight and 1 by West Kent Mediation.

18 interviews and meetings were conducted with PATH partners including Citizen's Advice North & West Kent, Crosslight, Porchlight, West Kent Mediation and The Samaritans. West Kent Mind was unable to engage in the evaluation process owing to a lack of organisational capacity. Some partners were interviewed more than once and were able to share their views on the project's impact, challenges, areas for improvement and potential next steps.

Over 30 key documents were reviewed by the evaluation to support both the qualitative and quantitative impact of the project, including self-evaluations, regular reports to the National Lottery Community Fund, project management statistics, case studies and minutes of partnership meetings.

These activities have enabled the evaluator to produce this report, which evidences the project's impact, highlights good practice and identifies a number of areas for improvement for consideration by the partnership as the project enters its fifth and final year.



# Impact Summary

Our evaluation finds that PATH has achieved significant impact for people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness during its first four years.

This is discussed in detail throughout the report, but here's a summary of key findings (all figures are to date, from Years 1 through to Year 4, which ended in June 2020).

- 2880 people helped, exceeding target of 2702.
- 773 people experiencing actual or threatened homelessness were

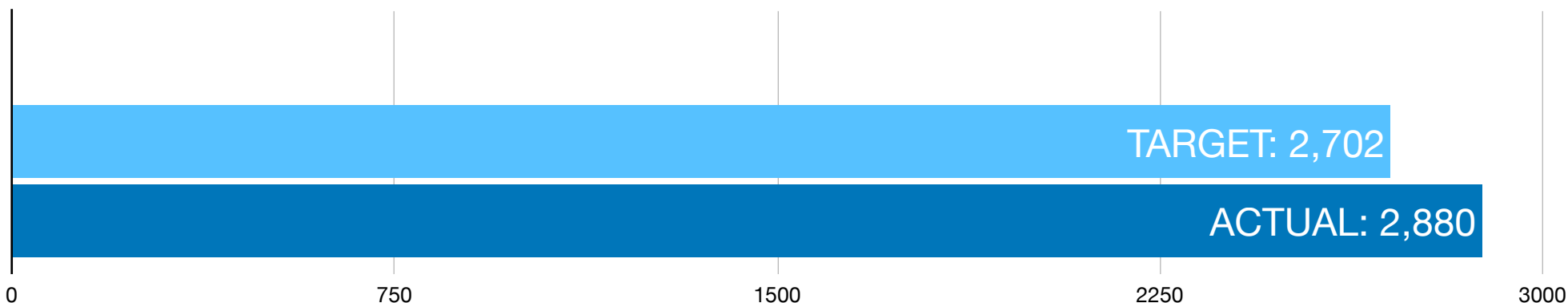
helped to secure accommodation, exceeding the project target by 32%.

- 364 people experiencing actual or threatened homelessness received tailored advice and support.
- 1599 people at high risk of actual or threatened homelessness received tailored debt, benefits and housing advice, exceeding the target (1525).
- 144 people at high risk of actual or threatened homelessness received tailored mental health support and

mediation to reduce conflict that may otherwise result in homelessness.

- Partners have improved understanding of the needs of service users, both within and outside of the PATH partnership.
- At least 40 local organisations have received formal presentations by PATH, with many more benefiting from regular contact with partners.
- Community Champions have been identified and are being supported to ensure their voices are heard.

Number of People Helped Years 1-4



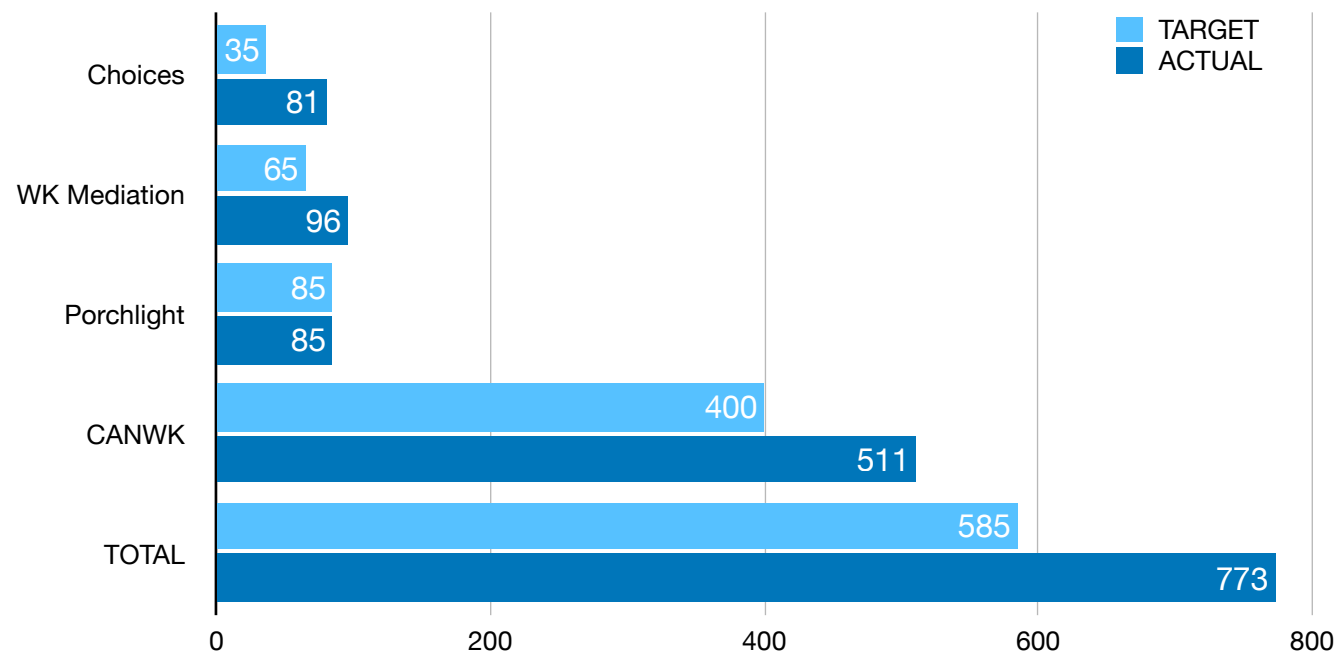
# 1. Improving the circumstances of people who have experienced actual or threatened homelessness.

## 1.1 Securing accommodation

773 people had been assisted with securing accommodation by the end of Year 4, exceeding the project's target (585) by 32%. PATH assisted in a number of ways, including supporting rough sleepers to find temporary accommodation, supporting people at risk of eviction to resolve their crisis and stay in their home and working with people preventatively to resolve conflict which may otherwise result in homelessness.

One client was faced with eviction after his mother died and it transpired that he was not named on the tenancy agreement. He describes how the support and advice he received through

Number of clients helped under Outcome 1.1



PATH enabled him to secure accommodation and remain in his childhood home:

“Since my divorce, I’d been living with Mum but, when she died earlier this year, I found out that I wasn’t on the tenancy and was at risk of being evicted. This was a huge knock, I was grieving, we didn’t know if we could have a funeral because of COVID-19 and now this to deal with. I’ve had a lot of health problems, mostly heart-related, and I was suddenly under a lot of additional stress.

I got in touch with Citizens Advice and they were great, they wrote letters to support me staying there because of my health problems, but also because my brother and nephew often stay to help me. They helped me get a new Housing Officer as the previous one had not been helpful and they stopped me from going back on the housing list and starting the whole process again.

Sara (at Citizens Advice) said don’t worry, we’ll sort it - and she did. After five months, I was told we could

keep the house and it was such a relief. Now I can focus on getting my health back to normal.”

Some partners saw significant over-achievement in their targets, with Choices exceeding their planned target of housing 35 people by 131% (81) and West Kent Mediation exceeding their plans to provide 65 sessions by 48% (96 sessions).

This evidences significant added value, but also supports the view of some partners that their delivery exceeds the budget and resources made available through the project, which may be something to reconsider in the future.

One client described how PATH partners helped him to secure accommodation after he became homeless following a nervous breakdown and a series of traumatic events:

“I never expected I'd be homeless. I had my own business and was doing well, but my son went to prison, my relationship broke down and I had a nervous breakdown and ended up living in a hostel. I managed to find temporary accommodation, but I had severe depression and was struggling, I ran up

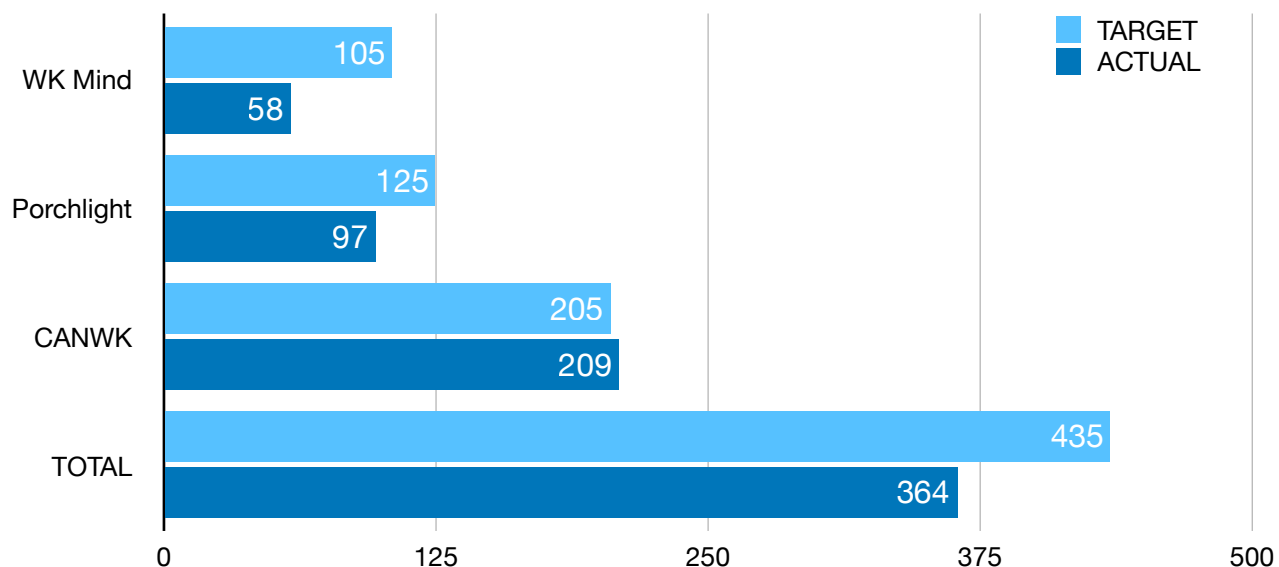
loads of debt, it was like life had become unmanageable for me.

Someone gave me Crosslight's number and they helped me get my life back on track. They took all the paperwork, organised it all for me and got in touch with my creditors to sort it all out. They put me in touch with other organisations, like Live Well Kent and the Shaw Trust, who have kept me working. Now I feel like I can breathe a little better, stand upright and feel lighter. I'm feeling more positive about the future and I'm hoping to start my business again.”

## 1.2 Providing tailored advice and support

364 people received tailored advice and support from PATH by the end of Year 4. This included supporting people by providing them with specific advice and support relating to their housing crisis, which could include supporting them at meetings with statutory partners, supporting them to manage their mental health, either preventatively or during time of crisis, and supporting people who are street homeless,

Number of clients helped under Outcome 1.2



particularly those who are vulnerable as a result of exploitation or criminal activity.

83% of the target had been reached by the end of Year 4. Whilst some partners had been unable to meet their individual targets, there was considerable progress year on year. Porchlight, for example, increased the number of people helped between years 3 and 4 by 100%. We suspect this might also be an early indication of the additional need for support as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which began part way through Year 4.

One client was threatened with homelessness after being evicted by a housing association. He describes how PATH was able to provide advice and support, enabling him to resolve his financial difficulties so he could focus on securing new accommodation:

"I got into a bad place. The housing association had evicted me and my debts were stacking up. In hindsight, I could have just said I'm sorry, I don't have any money, but I couldn't face opening the envelopes so I just scooped everything up and put it on a pile. I was staying at a homeless hostel and someone put me in touch with Crosslight. They helped me make a list of all my debts, then they got in touch with everyone and sorted it out.

They also found a few duplicate debts, which helped to reduce the amount I owe. Now all I need to do is pass any letters over to them, which keeps my head clear so I can focus on finding somewhere to move on to. My situation is overwhelming, but I never feel judged by Crosslight, they're all nice people."

Porchlight describes how PATH enhances its support to people who are street homeless by enabling them to administer additional advice, both on the street and through local drop-ins.

For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, if someone needed help with a tenancy and they were also a victim of human trafficking, Porchlight could refer them to PATH and reduce the administrative burden on the individual by removing a number of referral "hoops".

Throughout the first four years, partners have experimented with a number of delivery models, including drop-ins at key venues where people could visit partners without an appointment to find out about the advice and support offered.

These were discontinued due to lack of attendance, but some partners report positive outcomes for those who did attend, particularly for those who were street homeless and could receive food parcels, as well as being referred directly to other support services.



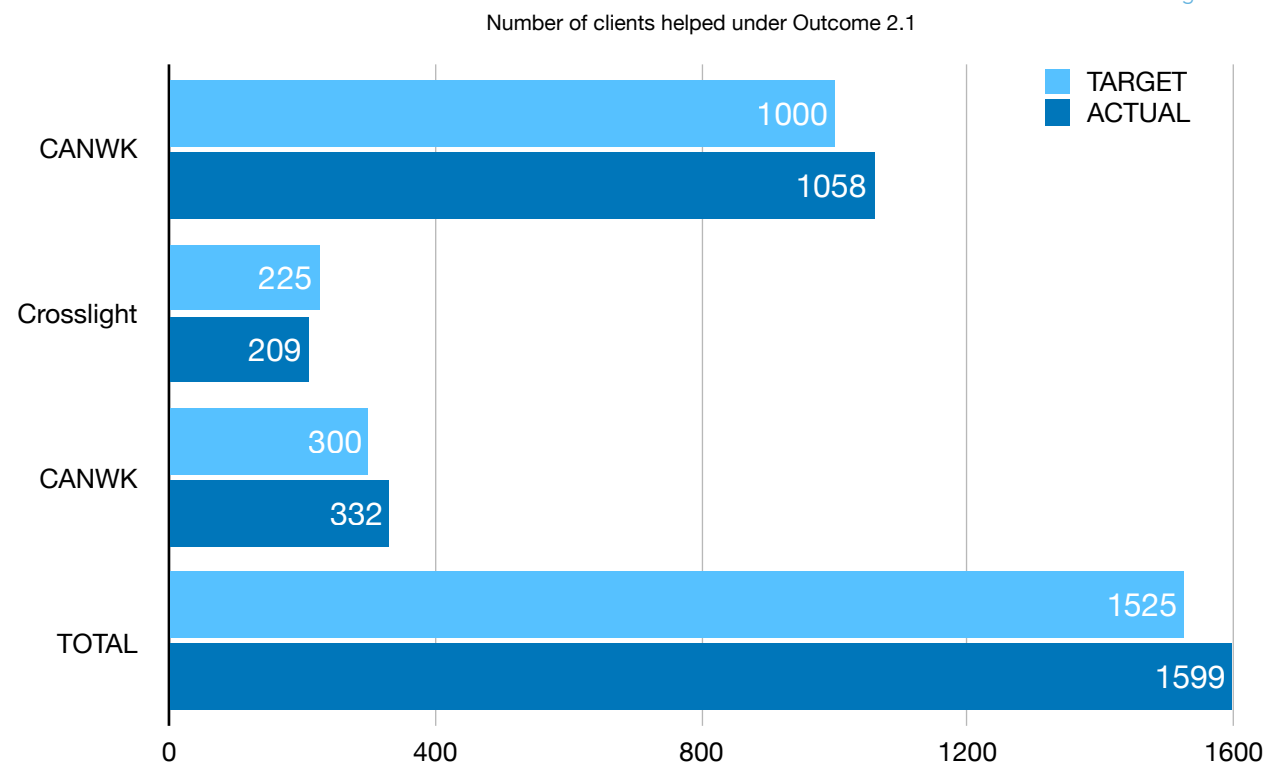
## 2. Enabling people at high risk of actual or threatened homelessness to plan for the future

### 2.1 Providing tailored debt, benefits and housing advice.

1599 people have received tailored debt, benefits and housing advice by the end of Year 4, slightly more than the target of 1525. Clients report that PATH has helped by enabling them to understand complex processes relating to debt and housing, by providing individual support to ascertain household income and develop workable budgets and plans and by checking benefits to ensure clients are claiming what they are entitled too, often increasing their income and reducing the risk of homelessness.

PATH has also offered effective preventative support to people at risk of homelessness. One widow described how she had been able to stay at home following the death of her husband, thanks to the advice and support she received:

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"Shortly after my husband passed away, I was threatened with eviction. We'd been doing OK financially, but I suddenly lost £1300 a month when he died and had to prioritise food over bills. I didn't know where to go, but somehow I found out about Citizens Advice and I picked up the phone to them and cried. They said let's take it one step at a time and helped me sort out my bills, benefits, etc.

They got on touch with all my debtors and made repayment arrangements that I could afford, they helped me to access benefits I didn't know I was entitled to and they also found £50 for me to buy a new cooker. They don't tell you what you *should* do, but they give you advice on what you *could* and make sure you understand all your options. I don't know what I would have done without them."

Clients report that PATH partners have also helped them to navigate complex welfare systems that they would have been unable to navigate alone and provide ongoing support to maintain accommodation and prevent homelessness. One client describes how PATH helped when an unexpected rent demand left him facing eviction:

“My landlord suddenly demanded a year’s rent in advance, which caused me some problems. I was referred to Citizens Advice and they’ve been helping me sort things out. They were able to get through to the right people, which I couldn’t have done myself. They contacted agents and landlords on my behalf and they also helped me apply for universal credit and improved my financial situation because I hadn’t been claiming the right benefits.

They were polite and helpful and I like that we did it all over the phone with a real person and not on a computer. They even arranged some calls for me and they listened in the background in case I needed any help or reassurance.”

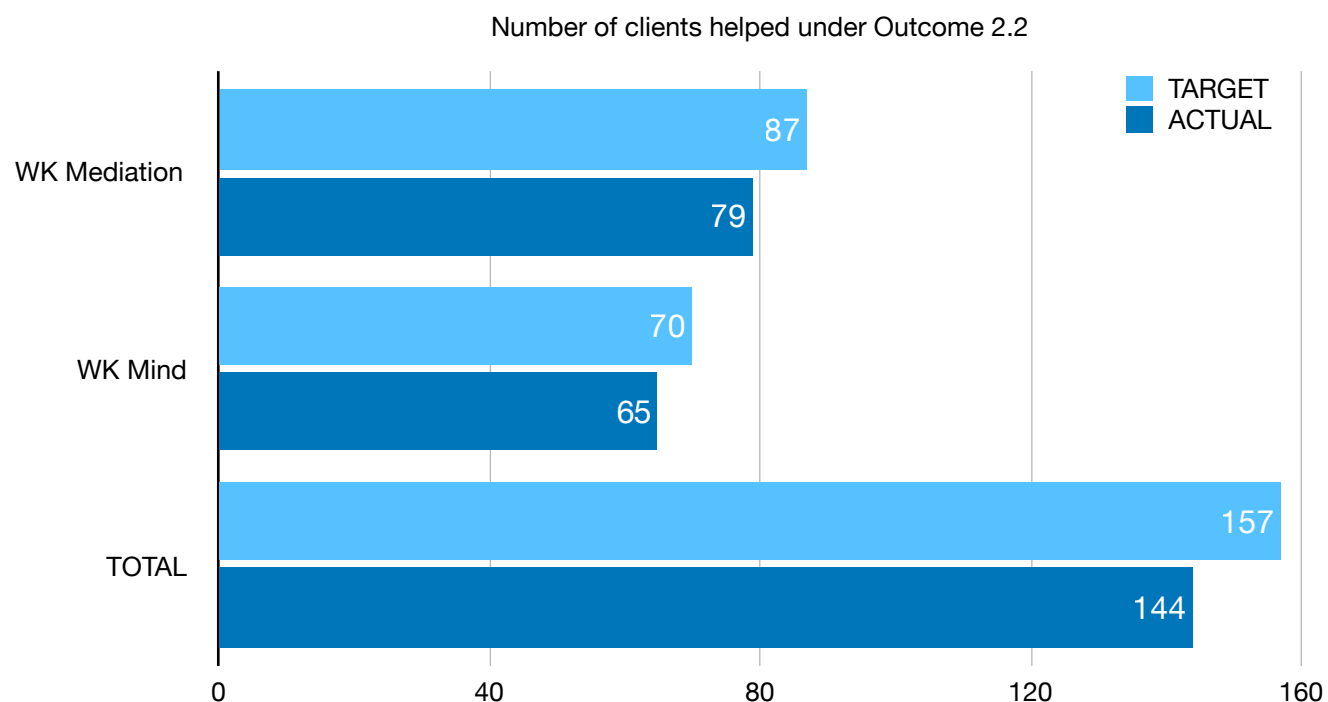
## 2.2 Providing tailored mental health support and mediation.

144 people received tailored mental health support and mediation by the end of year four, 91% of the planned target of 157. PATH helped by providing mediation to resolve conflicts that may result in eviction or homelessness, particularly conflicts between neighbours where housing associations were concerned about the viability of tenancies, or conflict within families

which may result in teenagers moving out of the family home without any secure arrangements.

The project also helped by providing individual support to people experiencing mental health difficulties and by enabling them to access group support and workshops to help promote wellbeing, resolve conflict and reduce stress.

One client described how PATH had referred him to West Kent Mediation, where he had been



supported to stabilise his son's potentially volatile living arrangements:

"My ex partner turned my son against me after we split up. His social worker put us in touch with West Kent Mediation so we could try and rebuild our relationship. He's a teenager with a lot on his plate and he can get angry and overwhelmed. Mediation enabled us both to have a safe forum where we could speak freely and it helped to break the ice. WKM were professional and approachable and their support has really helped us to get to a good place in our relationship."

A survey by PATH partners in Year 3 found that 94% of those surveyed (31 clients) felt more optimistic about their future as a result of working with PATH.

This is echoed by another client, who was referred to the project primarily as a result of his mental health, which had been exacerbated by a work-related dispute. He describes how PATH partners were able to work together to provide him with tailored support:

"I'd been working for the NHS for many years, but I was off work following an employment dispute, which led to stress and depression. I ran out of statutory sick pay and my employer refused to pay me. I lost the plot and started drinking heavily and I racked up £26,000 of credit card debt in six weeks.

West Kent Mind were helping me and they put me in touch with Crosslight who contacted everyone I owed money to and helped to make new repayment arrangements.

They helped to arrange payment holidays with my mortgage lender and credit card companies and explained to other creditors that I wasn't in a good place when I borrowed money from them and attempted to get it written off, with supporting evidence from my GP.

Crosslight helped me learn about budgeting, which I've never been good at, and I attended some money courses they arranged on Zoom after all the face-to-face work stopped due to COVID-19. I've carried on receiving support from West Kent Mind too, including art therapy and anger management, which has all really helped me.

My work situation is not fully resolved, but my union is involved now and has convinced them to pay my salary, which helps. My mental health is much better, I'm doing more around the house and taking up old hobbies and interests, including cycling and carpentry."

### 3. Improving support to people facing hardship by sharing learning and evidence across organisations, producing detailed findings and using feedback to improve understanding of the needs of service users

#### Monitoring & Reporting

PATH partners have met their obligations to produce detailed findings by submitting regular reports to Citizens Advice North & West Kent, which collates them and reports to the National Lottery Community Fund. Partners suggest that project management has improved tremendously in the last two years; they hold regular quarterly meetings, collate case studies and share information about local challenges and opportunities.

#### Improving Understanding

PATH partners report that the project has enabled them to develop a better understanding of their respective services and refer people in need more appropriately. Some say they have developed a good rapport with individuals in partner organisations and feel more confident about making informal enquiries or discussing individual cases to ensure people get the support they need.

Partners report that the common referral process, whilst not necessarily any faster, enables

them to engage with clients earlier in the process so they provide information about their service and offer reassurance that help is on the way.

For example, a young woman was referred to Choices as the result of domestic abuse, but she had also been trafficked, which meant Choices could speak to Porchlight about potential support at an early stage and arrange additional help.

PATH partners planned to enable 10 organisations per year to better understand the needs of service users. It was envisaged that this would be achieved through formal presentations and representation at local group meetings, forums, etc..

Whilst this target has been achieved, we suspect it only tells part of the story as the project has been able to reach a much wider range of partners informally through its ongoing work with referrers and supporting organisations, many of which will have developed a greater understanding of the needs of homeless people and those at risk of homelessness, albeit this incidental learning has not been noted formally.

One client interviewed named at least 5 organisations that had supported him, both within and outside of the PATH partnership and, given the large number of people supported, his experience is likely to be replicated, particularly where clients are presenting complex issues and may have dealt with multiple agencies.

## Increasing Community Engagement

Some organisations report that PATH has enabled them to have higher levels of local engagement than they may have done previously. Samaritans, for example, is known for its confidential helpline, but they report their inclusion in the partnership has increased their knowledge of other local support organisations, leading to their “feet on the street” volunteers providing information about PATH when they come across people who may benefit.

## Creating Added Value for Service Users

It is clear that the project has delivered significant added value by enabling partners to deliver other opportunities which would not have been possible without PATH. For example, Citizens Advice North & West Kent is the only

source of free legal housing advice in North and West Kent and would be unable to offer this service without the support of the National Lottery Community Fund, particularly as the charity accounts for 72% of PATH interventions.

Similarly, PATH funding enables Crosslight to employ an additional Debt Advisor by part-funding their salary, which enhances the level of service offered to people experiencing hardship. Partners suggest PATH adds value by providing an additional point of access for those in need.



## 4. Strengthening the voice of those facing hardship to shape a better response to their needs by identifying and supporting Peer Champions and participating in local forums

In recent months, partners have made considerable progress on this outcome, which has been a consistent challenge throughout the project. Strengthening the voice of those facing hardship is a critical aspiration of the partnership, but the methodology devised in the original bid had not proven to be effective.

Peer Champions were intended to be service users who, having overcome hardship or crisis, could be supported by PATH partners to advocate on behalf of others who may still be experiencing difficulties. It was hoped that Peer

Champions could liaise with other service users and share their experiences to inform local statutory and voluntary partners.

PATH partners have considered a number of ways in which Peer Champions could be recruited, including open events, voucher systems and direct approaches, but none have proven to be viable. Our evaluation identifies a number of factors which have impacted on the project's ability to deliver this outcome as follows:

- Path clients are not a homogenous group. Their individual circumstances vary greatly and one experience of hardship does not qualify an individual to understand of all experiences, nor represent such a wide and diverse range of experiences.
- Many clients have complex needs and are struggling to cope with their own crisis, which could be exacerbated by committing to a voluntary role or may limit their capacity to support others in crisis.
- Similarly, having received support from PATH, many clients prefer to move on with their lives and are reluctant to speak about their previous difficulties through pride, embarrassment, lack of confidence or because it reminds them of a negative time in their lives.
- People benefiting from PATH tend to be transient, in that the support they receive often resolves their issue and they move on without needing to maintain any further contact with the organisation that helped them, therefore reducing the opportunity for ongoing engagement.
- PATH partners have struggled to find the capacity to recruit champions, with some suggesting that it challenges their policies around confidentiality and GDPR and others suggesting there is no incentive or clear plan for potential champions.

However, it's important to note that the challenges surrounding the Peer Champions model have not deterred PATH partners from

ensuring that the voices of beneficiaries play a role in shaping the project.

In early 2020, part way through Year Three, partners renegotiated this outcome with the National Lottery Community Fund and agreed to focus on supporting individual partners to represent the voices of their own beneficiaries by collecting case studies, delivering focus groups and exploring the help they need, in addition to the circumstances surrounding their crisis and learning what could have prevented it.

Partners have appointed Community Champions from each organisation who contribute to regular conversations with partners to ensure the voices of beneficiaries are heard and can influence the direction of the project as a whole.

It seems likely that some of these activities will have been impacted by the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, but latest reports appear to indicate positive developments.

## Challenges and Areas for Improvement

### Organisational Evolution

Five years is a long time and a lot has changed for PATH partners during that time. Some partners have merged with other organisations, some have broadened (or restricted) the focus of their work following funding gains and losses and there have been a number of staff changes.

Whilst the project has continued to deliver its outcomes for clients, these significant changes have undoubtedly impacted on partners ability to develop a shared vision for PATH and to maintain a consistent approach to partnership.

### Identifying Long-Term Impact

Understanding the impact of PATH has been a challenge throughout the project. Clients tend to move on following support and do not stay in contact with PATH partners, making it difficult to gauge the long-term effectiveness of their intervention, however effective their initial support may have been. Partners have trailed

various measures to capture impact, but these are sometimes at odds with the wider measures adopted by their organisation, which can render the client experience a little cumbersome.

### Recording and Reporting

PATH partners, with the exception of CANWK, describe recording and reporting as a little onerous, although it's clear that this has been reviewed periodically and reduced to the current process, which is the bare minimum required to help CANWK meet its obligations to the funder.

We can not see how it could be reduced any further, but we suggest it is lacking in qualitative data and would benefit from a brief summary of partner's achievements under each outcome.

### Working in Partnership

PATH partners report that they work well together and share a common passion for supporting people in crisis. However, our sense is that the partnership lacks a common identity, which limits its ability to develop a shared vision.

Contact between partners tends to be transactional rather than aspirational and, whilst all partners are fulfilling what is expected of them and delivering high levels of impact, there is a sense that this could be increased further by developing a common vision and strategy.

Consequently, it may be that the current partnership does not now serve its intended purpose and we suspect partners would be able to achieve the same levels of impact without the need to service and manage the partnership.

### **Marketing & Promotion**

Partners have made considerable effort to promote the project, including producing leaflets, posters and hosting events, but the lack of shared identity has been a consistent challenge, although it is unlikely this has had any bearing on outcomes given the high numbers of people being referred by partner organisations.

### **Duplication of Service**

Organisational evolution has led to some duplication within the project, with some partners providing services now which they were

not providing when PATH was developed. For example, there are now three partners providing debt advice and it would be illogical for those partners to refer a client elsewhere when it is able to provide them with a service directly.

### **Geographical Challenges**

The area covered by PATH spans multiple boroughs and districts. Again, the areas in which partners work has changed over time and this can impact on their ability to respond. For example, one partner is in contact with a client in Tunbridge Wells who would benefit from the service provided by another partner, but that partner does not work in their area. It would be helpful to address these inconsistencies.

### **Referral Management**

Referral management has improved greatly since the introduction of Refernet, but there are mixed views on whether clients access services more quickly as a result of being referred to PATH or being referred to individual organisations.

Cross referrals between partners have been fewer than anticipated, with some partners

suggesting this impacts on their ability to meet targets and impedes forward-planning; although it seems unlikely that this has prevented clients from accessing support and the project has received sufficient numbers of referrals to meet, and sometimes exceed, its targets.

### **Variation in Policies and Processes**

PATH Partners have different policies surrounding key activities such as confidentiality and data protection and, in some cases, are unable to share information with other partners.

### **Added Value Versus Potential Costs**

Some partners report that the cost of delivering PATH outweighs the level of funding received. Crosslight estimates that the true cost of delivering PATH in Year 3 was £56,000 whilst West Kent Mediation estimates that it provided £16,000 worth of support through PATH one year, with both receiving just £7500 per annum.

Whilst this represents tremendous value for money insofar as the project is concerned, it does raise a question about whether the current model is sustainable in the long-term.

## Potential Developments

As the PATH project enters its fifth and final year, PATH partners are looking towards the future and considering how they might continue to address the needs of people facing hardship and crisis. Our evaluation, particularly our conversations with clients and PATH partners, identifies a number of potential developments which partners may like to consider in their planning.

### Impact of COVID-19

It seems likely that the pandemic will create a number of challenges which PATH partners are well-placed to address. Landlords have been prevented by law from chasing tenants for arrears, which could lead to a bottleneck of legal action during autumn 2020. The extended lockdown may result in more pressure at home, particularly for those experiencing domestic abuse or mental health difficulties.

Unemployment seems likely to rise as companies reduce staff to save costs and some partners already report a rise in issues concerning loans

and credit cards. Whilst the government's furlough scheme has offered some protection, we may see a sharp rise in redundancies or see people unable to pay their mortgage or rent.

### Housing Issues

Emergency legislation introduced in response to COVID-19 currently prevents landlords from chasing rent arrears or issuing eviction notices. Furthermore, CANWK has seen a 50% downturn in the number of people requesting help with debt problems, largely because of consumer protection measures.

However, when these temporary measures are lifted, it seems highly likely that the partnership will see a sudden increase in people facing debt, which will also impact on housing security. CANWK is already concerned about the potential misuse of legislation, such as Section 21 notices, which provide a mandatory repossession for any reason, being used to get around emergency measures for COVID-19, potentially increasing hardship for tenants.

The Homelessness Reduction Act also supports the need for continuing support for people

facing homelessness or threatened homelessness, in addition to encouraging organisations to work together to improve advice and support for those most at risk.

Some partners report that the Act has not been entirely effective and, in some cases, has presented clients with alternative problems, such as downgrading their level of risk and therefore reducing the support from local authorities. CANWK already plans to undertake further research and consultation to establish what people in housing crisis need and how their crisis can be prevented.

### Increasing and Unmet Needs

Porchlight report that exploitation has increased by 200%, with a notable increase in county lines and the movement of drugs as criminals attempt to compensate for a sudden drop in sales owing to the lockdown and reduced social gatherings, which may increase the risk of homelessness for those who are dependent on drugs, or their families who are made homeless following prosecution.

Other social issues, such as drug and alcohol use can also impact on homelessness and it may prove beneficial for PATH to source specialist support.

### **Increased Engagement in Local Forums**

Partners report that the project's engagement in local forums has been limited. Whilst individual organisations may attend local meetings, they are not there to represent PATH. Engagement in local forums, such as Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC), the Community Safety Partnership, local housing forums and Advice Together, a CANWK-led initiative to provide a referral network for advice and support, could all increase engagement.

### **Other Local Models**

Partners have identified a number of local models which they suggest have a positive impact on those facing crisis and may help to inform future developments for those in need:

**Dartford Community Hub** supports the local community to identify local needs and take

action, increasing their confidence and skills and making the area a better place to live.

**Catching Lives** supports rough sleepers, homeless and vulnerably housed people in Canterbury and East Kent. Partners referred to its day centre in Canterbury as a positive way in which centre-based advice and support could potentially be delivered by PATH in the future.

**Marsham Street Cafe** in Maidstone demonstrates how services can be delivered in a relaxed, informal environment. In this case, the cafe is run by people with learning disabilities, who are able to build skills and confidence.

**The Hero Project**, hosted by Sevenoaks District Council, has been referred to as a positive model for the provision of personalised advice and information on a range of issues, including housing, debt and benefits advice.



# Recommendations

The PATH Project has had considerable impact in the lives of people who have experienced, or are at risk of, homelessness and partners have worked hard to ensure targets are met and, in some cases, exceeded. Our evaluation has identified a number of challenges which have, at times, prevented the project from realising its full impact and we offer the following recommendations to address some of these:

## Short-Term

As the project enters its fifth and final year, systems and processes are already in place and there seems little benefit in making major alterations, particularly as the project is delivering project outcomes and partners are contending with the new working arrangements brought about as a result of the pandemic.

We recognise that some partners have identified administration as a challenge, but CANWK has continually refined monitoring and reporting processes to ensure they are not overly

bureaucratic, whilst still meeting its obligations to the National Lottery Community Fund.

Therefore, our short-term recommendations for Year 5 are as follows:

- 1) **Outcome Delivery** - to continue to deliver the level of service which enables the project to meet its outcomes and maintain the current level of high quality support to those in need.
- 2) **Monitoring & Reporting** - to continue basic monitoring and reporting to enable CANWK to report the impact of the project, essentially monthly submissions of key statistics and case studies.
- 3) **Centralise Processes** - to continue to centralise processes where possible, particularly around confidentiality and data protection, which have been identified as occasionally problematic.
- 4) **Engage Local Partners** - to engage local partners outside of the PATH partnership to establish their views on the needs of people facing housing crisis or hardship and to

informally discuss some of the suggestion outlined in this evaluation, particularly those with strategic oversight at local Councils and housing associations.

## Medium to Long Term

Looking ahead, it's clear that PATH in its current form was a workable proposal when it was first developed five years ago, but the needs of service users and the support provided by partners has evolved since then and any new development would likely require a complete rethink. With that in mind, we recommend:

### 5) **Revise the current model**

A complete revision of the current model would address a number of the challenges identified by removing some of the additional work involved in maintaining the current partnership.

One potential model could see a lead partner acting as a central point for referrals and taking responsibility for developing partnerships, promoting the project and monitoring and reporting. The partnership could be broadened to include a wider range of partners, who could

be “commissioned” by the lead partner on an ad hoc basis, therefore reducing the administrative burden on partners, who recover full costs for any services they deliver for PATH.

Such a model may also serve to address a number of the challenges identified throughout our evaluation. For example, a wider range of delivery partners could address gaps in provision, such as working in new areas or supporting people with drug or alcohol issues.

Duplication could become less relevant as the lead partner would pass on referrals based on location, or by who can provide support the soonest. Referrals would be centralised and partners would be funded for work delivered, rather than receive a static amount.

## 6) Introduce a PATH Team

If PATH is to be a distinct service offered in addition to the current activities of partners, we recommend that a designated PATH team is established, with its own Project Manager and administrative support.

The team could be hosted by the lead partner and could act as a triage for referrals, ensuring people receive support with their crisis from the appropriate delivery partners. T

The Project Manager would also attend local forums and develop key partnerships but, crucially, act as a conduit for people in need to receive support from any of the delivery partners they represent.

## 7) Explore Brokerage Models

We can see the potential for a lead partner to act as a broker and enable clients to make contact with a wider range of support services, which could include long-term support or one-off events such as course or skills-based work. We recommend exploring similar models which are more prevalent in health and social care.

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To find out more about PATH, please contact Paul Austin at Citizens Advice North & West Kent at [paul.austin@nwkent.cab.org.uk](mailto:paul.austin@nwkent.cab.org.uk)

## About the Author

Steve Allman is an independent consultant with an extensive background leading and developing third sector organisations. He supports charities and social enterprises to evaluate and communicate impact, particularly those which support vulnerable and marginalised groups.

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